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ABSTRACT

The recently proposed school administration reforms concentrate largely on the issues surrounding recruiting, selecting, and preparing potential administrators; yet little is know about what it is like to become a school administrator, and virtually no research on beginning administrators has been done. Related literature does describe the uncertainty, stress, responsibilty, and conflicts experienced by principals during their first years on the job. In April and May 1989, 7 of 8 first- and second-year East Tennessee principals (7 female and 1 male, and 5 white and 3 black) were interviewed and observed; the eighth principal was interviewed in June 1989, and observed the following October. An analysis of collected data identified six recurring themes: the heavy weight of responsibility; the conflicting demands; the uncertainty; and the steady stream of human interactions. The findings of this study support existing principalship literature with few exceptions. Even in their first 2 years on the job, these principals had encountered most of the problems reported by their more experienced peers. Some differences, though, were evident. The problem of time constraints pervaded this study, but did not emerge as an issue in the literature. Powerlessness, however, occurred in the literature, but did not surface in this study. (12 references) (KM)

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BECOMING A PRINCIPAL:

THE FIRST YEARS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In its earliest years the current educational reform movement focused on ways to improve teaching. As a result, such new programs as teacher testing, state level evaluation programs, and merit pay were proposed and, in some cases, implemented. In the last two or three years, however, the focus has shifted somewhat; researchers and policymakers have begun to call for the reform of school administration.

The proposed reforms touch numerous aspects of the administrative process in American schools, but concentrate largely on the issues surrounding recruiting, selecting, and preparing potential administrators. For example, in a 1987 report the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) made eight "significant recommendations" (p. xiii), including the adoption of the professional school model for preparing school administrators, the reform of administrative licensure practices, and major public school involvement in administrator preparation (NCEEA, 1987). In a 1988 address, tellingly entitled "Educational Administration: Reform PDQ or RIP," Daniel Griffiths suggested that unless university programs in educational administration are reformed soon, the profession of educational administration will come to an end. Like the commission, Griffith urged major changes in preparation programs and closer collaboration with public schools (Griffiths, 1988).

In light of such recommendations, it is striking that very little is known about what it is like to become a school administrator. Daresh (1988b), a pioneer in the Danforth Foundation's innovative principal preparation program, found that virtually no research had been done on beginning administrators. This research project is, then, an attempt to help lay a foundation for research on beginning principals. Given the fact that this is largely unexplored terrain, the researchers chose to use a qualitative methodology to approach the problem.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Daresh (1988b) discovered that little research has been done on beginning school administrators. The small amount of available information suggests "that the first year of the principalship is a time filled with frustration and anxiety" (Daresh, 1988b, p. 3). New principals typically experience a sense of isolation from their peers and also from their teachers. As a result, Daresh suggested that their superordinates provide them with special consideration and support.

The literature contains some anecdotal, first person accounts of the first year in the principalship. In one recent report of this type, Davis (1988) described the uncertainty and stress which he experienced during his first year as principal of a high school in a middle class suburb. He found it especially difficult to adjust to the power, responsibility, and visibility of the principalship and compared the job to living in a fishbowl. In his opinion, "the key to survival in the fishbowl

is the principal's ability to refrain from personalizing criticism." (p. 76)

General studies of the principalship are also relevant to any consideration of the beginning principal. The classic in this area is Wolcott's The Man in the Principal's Office (1973). Wolcott, who "shadowed" a principal during much of a school year, discovered that his subject spent most of his time in personal, face-to-face encounters. He identified three major task areas for principals: (1) dealing with problems; (2) orienting and meeting people; and (3) caring for the school building itself. In Wolcott's view, although principals are often described as "leaders," the nature of the job prevents the exercise of true leadership. Rather, the principalship consists of continuously meeting the demands of other people. As a result, Wolcott perceived principals as anxious about the exact nature of their role. The principals observed by Wolcott were quite dissatisfied with the nature of their preparation in education administration, which they saw as irrelevant to their actual work. However, Wolcott considered their complaints ritualistic rather than substantive. At the heart of these criticisms of their preparation programs, he identified a paradox:

> Although the central objective of their professional lives is to promote the educational attainment of the pupils who attend their schools, principals hold their own formal education, and particularly their most recent experiences with it at its 'highest' levels, in low esteem. (p. 202)

More recently, Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) interviewed eight highly respected principals, first in unstructured, in-

depth interviews, and then in a group interview. Like other researchers, they found that principals are quite isolated and experience feelings of powerlessness because of the loosely coupled organizational structure of American schools. They concluded that effective principals have a vision for their schools, are willing to take initiative, and are extremely resourceful. However, they also concluded that many characteristics of the principalship create an "emotionally toxic" work situation. This "toxicity" probably explains the fact that within two years of the completion of the eight interviews, four of the subjects had left their jobs, and three others wanted to do so. Thus, Blumberg and Greenfield saw principal burn-out as a major problem.

Recently, other authors have addressed the conflicts inherent in the principal's role. Duke (1988) interviewed four principals who were considered very effective, but were contemplating quitting. He found that these principals felt overwhelmed by their job: by the heavy responsibility, by the constant interaction with people, by the paperwork, and by the conflicting demands placed upon them. He concluded that "confusion rather than clarity characterizes the principals' thinking about their role." (p. 312)

Rallis and Highsmith (1986) described in detail the contradiction between <u>managing</u> and <u>leading</u> a school. In their view the two tasks are quite different, and it is unlikely that the same individual will be talented at both. Currently, the

demands of the principalship are such that most principals have little choice; they must devote their time to management, leaving teachers to function autonomously. They recommended placing both a manager and a leader in every school.

Several authors have focused on principals' preparation programs and upon the need for changing them. For example, Daresh (1988a) criticized field-based programs in educational administration, suggesting that, although administrative work involves constant decision making, field-based experiences typically do not. He argued for pre-service mentoring, personal reflection, and the development of a personal philosophy in preparation programs.

Rogus and Drury (1988) acknowledged the loneliness and frustration of new principals, and then advocated induction programs for them. These induction programs would include three components: (1) large group activities, (2) small group activities, and (3) mentoring. Rogus and Drury believed that such programs would improve principals' performance and increase the likelihood that they would remain principals.

Maher (1988) surveyed one hundred principals and one hundred superintendents, finding widespread dissatisfaction with administrator preparation programs. Finding that administrators "face a never-ending stream of people, problems, and activities, all of which demand their immediate attention. . ." (p. 31), he argued that administrator dissatisfaction results from the unreasonably high expectations created by their graduate school

training. The result is cognitive dissonance. Maher concludes with a call for (unspecified) reforms of administrator preparation programs.

Stimson and Appelbaum (1988) studied the use of power by elementary principals in Alaska. They found that teachers were most satisfied with principals who used referent and expert power and that the more clearly principals understood their own power styles, the more satisfied teachers were. Their conclusion was that administrator preparation programs should include more information on the appropriate uses of power.

In summary, it can be said that although little is known about beginning principals, research on the principalship in general suggests that many of the frustrations of the job are due to role conflicts which are inherent in the position as it is currently defined. Moreover, the belief that principal preparation programs are inadequate is widespread.

Based on the literature review, the researchers posed the following research questions:

1. What challenges do first and second year principals say that they have experienced?
2. To what extent are first and second year principals aware of the role conflicts in their job?
3. How do first and second year principals perceive their education administration preparation?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The researchers developed a five part qualitative research design based in part on Wolcott's (1973) earlier work. The first component was a semi-structured interview about the challenges of the first year in the principalship. The researchers developed an interview protocol to use, but decided that if any subject showed a strong need to structure the interview material in his or her own way, deviations would be permitted. The second component was a two-hour observation of the principal during the school day. Third, a questionnaire was developed about educational administration preparation programs. Finally, two types of artifacts would be collected: each principal's routine correspondence for a week and a copy of each principal's weekly calendar.

It was not easy to find subjects; first and second year principals do not constitute a readily identifiable group, and most school systems either have no beginning principals at all or have only one or two. However, eventually the researchers were able to compile a list of nine first and second year principals whose schools were within reasonable driving distance of the University of Tennessee Knoxville. They selected eight of these for initial contact, reserving the ninth as an alternate. With one exception, the eight principals were randomly divided between the two researchers. The single exception was a principal who was already an acquaintance of one of the researchers; she was assigned to the other researcher. All eight of these principals

were contacted, and all agreed to participate in the research.

The final group of subjects consisted of eight first and second year principals in East Tennessee. Seven of these were female; one was male. Five were white, and three were black. Two were assigned to middle schools, five to elementary schools, and one to a primary (K-2) school. Three of the schools were located in middle to upper-middle class communities. The other five schools were situated in working class areas; three of these served predominantly black populations.

Seven principals were interviewed and observed in April and May 1989. Scheduling problems made it necessary to interview the eighth principal in June 1989 and to observe her the following October. The researchers tape-recorded the interviews and also took notes during them. The interviews were summarized and then transcribed for study. During the observations the researchers took condensed field notes which they afterward developed into expanded field notes for analysis. First, both the interview transcriptions and the expanded observation notes were analyzed to determine the nature of the principals' interactions--with whom they interacted, how, when, where, and for what purpose. These interactions were then summarized in tables, using frequency counts and percentages. The results were compared in relationship to the principals' race, to the socioeconomic class of the populations served, and to the time of day when the interactions occurred.

The transcriptions and notes were also analyzed for

recurring themes. Ultimately, six themes were identified: responsibility, time constraints, unpredictability, politics, peer support, and role conflict. During this part of the analysis, the researchers established a file for each theme and went through all of the data, listing evidence relative to each topic. Since the interviews and observations of the black principals appeared to be discrepant cases in certain respects, they were studied as a group.

The researchers summarized the eight questionnaires on education administration preparation by computing frequency counts for the first page; they computed mean scores for the course ratings on pages 2 and 3. Six of the principals provided their weekly correspondence. These 428 pieces of correspondence were analyzed according to their source or destination, frequency counts were done, and percentages were calculated. Only five of the principals had weekly calendars which could be studied. These were analyzed on the basis of the types of interaction which they indicated; frequency counts were done and percentages were calculated.

FINDINGS

Becoming a principal is a difficult task, even for those who have already had several years of administrative experience. One principal described her first year in these words: "It's scary; it's hectic; it's somewhat confusing." And another--who had spent years in the Central Office and in other systemwide positions--concurred: "It is challenging."

Through the interviews, observations, and documents a rather clear picture emerged of the nature of the challenges which a beginning principal faces. All but two principals commented specifically on the heavy weight of responsibility which they felt. In part, this responsibility weighs heavily because the principal is the ultimate decision maker in the school. For example, one new principal said, "It's scary to go in when you're the only one. You're the one that gets it all." Another beginning principal elaborated poignantly on this theme:

> Well, on your own, it is challenging. . . .Making your own decisions with no one to--to go back and say, "How do you think this will work?" Or "How do you think this will sound?" You know the policies, but to make the right decision is the greatest challenge.

It is probably significant that the two principals who did not mention the burden of decision-making were the two middle school principals, both of whom had assistant principals working with them in their buildings.

Another dimension of this heavy responsibility is the large number of people from diverse constituencies whom a principal must take into consideration at all times. An hour or two spent in a principal's office is most instructive in this regard. A steady stream of people arrives and departs: sick or misbehaving students, teachers with questions about a form or a test, parents wanting to enroll their children, custodians wondering when they should cut the grass, system-wide consultants with concerns about the curriculum. Meanwhile, the telephone is ringing frequently; parents, Central Office administrators, and other principals have

problems, major or minor, which they must discuss with the man or woman in the front office. (See Tables 1 and 2.) An analysis of principals' mail reveals the same diverse constituency. (See Table 3.) Although much of the correspondence--58%--came from Central Office--a wide range of people communicated with principals. These included not only parents and teachers as one might anticipate, but also the State Department of Education, professional organizations, public agencies, and private business firms.

It was not surprising, then, to hear principals speak of their feeling that they are responsible for a large number of people. Said one woman: "You definitely have to be a person that does not allow yourself to be under stress because being a principal you have the responsibility of protecting and looking after everybody." Another echoed her concern in these words: "There are so many people that you have to take care of, or be responsible for." Finally, one first year principal linked together the themes of the transition from teacher to front office, decision-making, and multiple constituencies in this way:

> In terms of making decisions, the end result has many more options [than in the classroom.] The decisions impact on many more people and many more programs than they would simply from a teacher's one program viewpoint.

Not surprisingly, given their role as the ultimate decision-maker who must balance the needs of multiple constituencies, all

Table 1

Principals' personal interactions

Persons	Percentage
Students	46%
Teachers	22%
Staff	18%
Parents	5%
Other administrators	5%
Miscellaneous, unknown	3%

(Because of rounding, percentages do not add up to 100.)

Table 2

Principals' weekly interactions according to calendars

Interactions	Percentage
Special school events	24%
Teacher evaluations	23%
Appointments with unknown persons	10%
District-wide meetings	9%
Faculty/staff meetings	8%
Parent meetings/conferences	8%
Professional meetings	5%
Visitors/observers	5%
Training sessions	3%
Meetings with superordinates	2%
Monitoring activities	2%
Meetings with community	1%

Table 3

Analysis of principals' correspondence

Sources/destinations	Percentage
Central Office	58%
Teachers/staff	16%
Outside educational agencies	8%
Parents	6%
Local noneducational agencies	4%
Private enterprises	4%
Local educational agencies	2%
Miscellaneous	3%

(Because of rounding, percentages add up to more than 100.)

of the principals felt that their job placed enormous time demands on them, and several said that this fact had surprised them when they stepped into their new role. The pressure of time, of work which must be completed before a specific date, was apparent even to an observer in a principal's office. Time measuring and organizing devices--clocks, calendars, and schedules--were not only visible, but they were frequently checked and consulted. Some of the principals had numerous file folders on their worktable, each marked clearly with a deadline.

The problem of time and getting all of the work done on time pervaded every interview. All of the new principals worked long hours. The most extreme case was one first year principal who described her situation in this way:

> The day usually begins at breakfast time, and even though we have teachers on breakfast duty, I'm usually here. So we begin the day. . . .around ten of eight. [I call it a day at] 5:30, 6:00. . . .A lot of times I'm here until 8:00, but that's--I'll say 5:30 to 6:00. That's really. . .and I'm here on Saturdays and Sundays. . . .Preparing for faculty meetings, checking class assignments, things like that.

Another principal described the day on which she was being interviewed. She had made telephone calls at home from 6:15 A.M. until 6:30 A.M. to arrange for substitutes, and then had arrived in the building at 6:45 A.M. Since Kindergarten Round-Up was being held at her school that day, she was required to remain there until 8:00 P.M. When she finally returned home, she would have to make notes to prepare for a conference with a teacher on the following day.

In spite of spending enormous amounts of time on their job, several principals expressed the view that they were unable to get everything done to their satisfaction. One first year principal's comment expressed a general concern:

> In terms of time--that's been a big difference. . .I find the hours are much longer to get the job done. I'd say I [put in] an average of between ten and twelve [hours]. And I still don't get finished!

These beginning principals were surprised, then, at the enormous responsibility placed on their shoulders, and at the vast amount of time necessary to perform their required tasks. They also described the necessity of adapting to a job which was extremely unpredictable and very difficult to control. One question in the interview guide was: "Describe a typical day." Five of the eight principals responded spontaneously, in almost identical words, and often with laughter, that there was no such thing as a typical day in the principalship. One went on to explain that she was unable, "from one day to the other [to] plan what my day is going to be like." Another, a principal in an elementary school in a lower socioeconomic area, provided poignant details:

> Some days are calm and quiet. Some are just as nice as you could ever want anywhere. We have children come and read to us. . . .Some days you want to run out of here screaming. Everything you can think of happens, and there's nothing typical, and there's no way--unless you watch the moon--there's no way to determine how one day's going to be.

A third principal, the theorizer of the group, speculated:

> It's a very disjointed type job. I find that you really can't put detailed attention to something for a long time span. There're always other things. And I think that's the nature of the job.

Implicit in the comments and actions of all of the principals and explicit in those of two, was the knowledge that success as a principal depends on one's political skills. This view emerged most clearly with one elementary principal in the following exchange during the interview:

> **Principal:** Another [helpful] area [of administrator preparation] has been the politics! [Laughs.] That's the--I guess that's the greatest one of all! The politics of leadership. You mostly have to know what to do, when to do it, and where to do it. And with whom to do it!
>
> **Interviewer:** Within the school?
>
> **Principal:** Within the school.
>
> **Interviewer:** Within the community?
>
> **Principal:** And within the community.
>
> **Interviewer:** In the system?
>
> **Principal:** Right.
>
> **Interviewer:** All of the above?
>
> **Principal:** All the above! All the above!

Another principal stated that no one should be placed in a principalship in a school system unless he or she had had previous administrative experience within that system. The reason was political:

> [A person who lacks administrative experience] doesn't know all the politics of down at the Central Office as related to the principal's office and the roles that the Central Office can play. When you are a classroom teacher, you don't know all the people at the

> Central Office, much less what they do or how they react, or what their personality is, or whether or not they should be asked a question.

Other principals seemed unable or unwilling openly to discuss concepts of power or politics, but it was obvious that, at some level, they too were aware of the need to build coalitions and to work consciously to advance their schools. For example, two principals were observed telephoning other principals in the school system. Although one of these appeared merely to be maintaining her network, the other used an already existing contact to plan a joint strategy for foiling a proposed Central Office innovation. Yet a third principal contacted other administrators--both principals and Central Office personnel--a total of seventeen times during a two hour observation. These individuals seemed to be consciously working to build power and influence within the system. Two other principals, both black, addressed the issue of competition between principals in the system. One felt that she was disliked because she had succeeded in obtaining a great deal of positive publicity for her school, making other principals feel that she was trying to compete with them for favorable notice from the Central Office and from the community. The other felt that the principals of schools in wealthier areas looked down on inner city schools and sought to obtain a disproportionate share of the system's resources for themselves.

Principals also touched upon the problem of parents who played politics, seeking special privileges or school system

resources for themselves. In two elementary schools located in middle class communities, parents or groups of parents had sought special privileges for their children. For example, one principal explained at length her refusal to let parents request their child's teacher for the next school year. She felt strongly that class assignments should be determined by professionals, yet had met with considerable parental pressure in this area. As she described it:

> There are a couple of parents. . .who thought, "Well, there's a new person on the block. I'll go in and tell her that I think such and such should be done. Or I will go in and tell her that I want my child to be in that classroom teacher and that's all there is to it." And I've just had to say, "No. This is the way it's going to be. I am the boss of this school."

Two other principals expressed an awareness of the conflicting desires of their different constituencies and of the need to work to harmonize or mediate between these groups. As one put it:

> You have to be sure you're doing what's correct for your teachers; you have to be sure you're taking into consideration about the parents; you have to always make sure the child's first. You have to always make sure that all of these people get together. And that sometimes is very difficult.

It seems, then, that moving into a principalship brings an individual into the heart of a micropolitical process through which power and resources are continually being allocated and conflicts are continually being resolved. Interestingly, only two of the subjects identified these issues as political; however, all of the principals studied showed some awareness of

the new principal's need to develop and use political skills.

Isolation from peers -- a theme which appears in much of the literature on principals -- did not surface in this study. The reason may well be that the systems in which these principals work have support structures in place. Their calendars showed such events as meetings of elementary principals' associations as well as "resource area meetings." In their interviews, several principals also mentioned principals' meetings. And, as indicated above, some of the principals were observed contacting their peers by telephone. All of this evidence suggests that genuine support networks exist for these principals. Five of them spoke in almost glowing terms about their relationships with their peers. One principal described this support as follows:

> I think where we help each other just simply, basically, is when we can just get together and talk about the daily things we do. We talk to each other along the lines of, "Oh, what did you do? Did you have this to occur? What did you do?" . . . .I like to go and say, "The other day I had such and such to occur in my building. Did you ever have this to happen?"

Interestingly, most of the female principals described strong support, and in some cases they explicitly indicated that the more experienced male principals had been surprisingly accepting of and helpful to them. However, none of the three black principals mentioned receiving support from peers. One did not mention other principals at all; the other two seemed to perceive them as competitors. This fact, taken in conjunction with the fact that none of the black principals was observed contacting other principals or administrators by telephone,

suggests that perhaps they are not as well integrated into their support groups as are the new white principals.

As part of their interviews, the principals were asked about their education administration preparation. They also filled out questionnaires on this subject. (See Table 4.) Conversation and the questionnaire revealed that all of them had had numerous courses in administration. All were certified; three held doctorates. The literature suggests that principals generally have a low opinion of their preparation programs; this research, however, did not entirely support that position. On the questionnaire, the principals rated their courses in administration as relatively "helpful." The most highly rated course was the administrative internship, which was accorded the highest possible score by everyone who had ever had one. Other high scoring courses--all scored above 4 on a 1 to 5 scale--were supervision, communication, conflict management, organizational theory, personnel, politics of education, school law, and leadership theory.

The interviews, by and large, supported the findings on the questionnaire. These new principals felt that their courses had been, for the most part, helpful. A typical comment was made by a middle school principal:

> Most of the courses I had over there, the professors did fine. They gave us practical advice; they also gave us theoretical advice. Some of it has proven to be somewhat correct, and some I've never used.

Table 4

Perceived helpfulness of administration courses

Courses	*Rating
Administrative internship	5.00
Supervision	4.75
Communication	4.60
Conflict management	4.50
School law	4.25
Organizational theory	4.23
Personnel	4.14
Politics of education	4.13
Leadership theory	4.02
School public relations	4.00
Research	3.91
School finance	3.71
Administrative theory	3.43
School business management	3.38
School facilities planning	3.38
Computer applications	3.00

*Rating on a 1-5 scale

N=8

The conflict between theory and practice did emerge as a theme in the interviews, but not as a clear cut mandate to abandon either. One principal, for example, identified decision-making and conflict management as the most useful subjects she had studied because they had stimulated her to think. Another, after laughing about her theory and philosophy courses, conceded that:

> They did cause me to think a lot about things and so I was able to go back and recall if I needed, you know, to bring something like that up, or to go back, I did have that in a memory bank somewhere!

Most striking in the interviews was the fact that every principal, without exception, recommended that a meaningful internship be included as part of the preparation program. This recommendation was fully consistent with the high rating of the internship on the questionnaire. Finally, it should be noted that two of the three black principals--both assigned to schools in largely minority communities--suggested that administrator preparation programs include information about working with various American subcultures.

In the literature about the principalship, the poorly defined role of the principal is often noted, as is an inherent conflict between the roles of school manager and instructional leader. The potential for the latter conflict was clearly latent for almost all of these eight new principals, and two expressed conscious awareness of it. For example, although the school effectiveness literature stresses the importance of instructional leadership, only one principal was observed actually offering

instruction. The principal of a very small elementary school, she conducted an opening exercise which included instructional elements; she also taught a reading group. She stood alone among these principals; possibly the small size of her school made such instructional activities feasible for her.

Some might consider teacher evaluations a form of instructional leadership. These loomed large in the principals' allocation of their time. An analysis of their weekly calendars revealed that approximately 23% of their scheduled interactions were evaluation conferences with teachers. Only special school events appeared more frequently in their calendars. (See Table 2.) However, one could legitimately ask to what extent evaluation constitutes instructional leadership, since normally teachers are evaluated only every third year; and an evaluation usually includes only two or three relatively brief observations.

Several of the principals did seem to be making minor attempts at instructional leadership. For example, one placed pamphlets about good teaching practices in her teachers' mailboxes. Another spot checked student work--on the week-ends. Yet a third occasionally called children in to her office to read to her. Yet, by and large, these principals did not seem to be engaging in much instructional leadership.

Indeed, one wonders how the situation could be otherwise. Leadership requires extensive interaction with those who are to being led. If principals are to be genuine instructional leaders, then, they should frequently interact with those who

actually deliver instruction: teachers. Yet, this study suggested that these beginning principals were relatively isolated from their teachers. For example, only 22% of their personal interactions were with teachers, and faculty meetings accounted for only about 8% of the activities scheduled in the weekly calendars--a percentage identical with that of parent conferences. (See Tables 1 and 2.) Interestingly, teachers (and staff) accounted for approximately 16% of the written communication that these principals received, suggesting that the teachers often left notes in their principals' boxes rather than arranging face-to-face meetings. (See Table 3.)

The two principals who discussed the difficulty of providing instructional leadership linked it directly to the problem of time constraints. Said one elementary principal:

> I have 670 students and no assistant; and I find it just about impossible to give attention to everything with the quality that I should. . . .I think the things that are non-curricular, that require a lot of attention, such as finance, custodial, cafeteria, buses--those are the things that, you know, impact on my time as well. And so it certainly means that I don't spend as much time with the curriculum and classroom learning as I would like to.

A middle school principal spoke even more explicitly of the conflict:

> I think that the biggest myth that we have going at this point is the fact that we want principals to be instructional leaders in terms of curriculum, teaching techniques, teaching methods, and teaching teachers how to teach. Unfortunately, we don't have time, and we simply have to fall back on the fact that teachers are also prepared; and, luckily, for the most part, 95% of them do a good job.

Thus, this conflict did surface in this study of beginning principals. Given the time constraints within which they and their teachers work, it is possible that, with experience, more and more of these principals will begin to consider the instructional leadership role impossible, or even as a "myth."

CONCLUSIONS

From its inception this study was intended as an exploratory one. The conclusions, therefore, relate only to past and future research in this area, rather than to practice or principal preparation programs. In the opinion of the researchers, their sample is too small and their study too limited for them to make any other recommendations at this time.

It is apparent that the findings of this study strongly support the existing literature on the principalship. Even in their first two years on the job, these new principals had encountered most of the problems reported by their more experienced peers: the heavy weight of responsibility, the conflicting demands, the uncertainty, and the steady stream of human interactions. Thus, it would seem that most of the stresses inherent in the principalship surface early in a principal's career.

However, some differences were evident even in this limited study. The problem of time constraints pervaded these principals' interviews; yet it did not emerge as a major theme in the literature. It is possible that as principals adjust to their new role, they learn to manage their time more effectively

or choose to limit their time commitment to the job. It is possible, too, that they simply accept the heavy time demands of the position and cease to perceive them as a problem. At any rate, future researchers on both beginning and experienced principals might seriously consider the issue of time and its management. How much time do principals actually spend on their jobs? If they learn better time management skills, how do they do so? If over a period of years they cease to perform certain tasks, which ones do they drop? How do they decide to drop them? To whom are these tasks delegated? Or do they simply cease to be performed? The answers to these questions might shed valuable light on the problem of principal burn-out.

A theme which occurs in the literature but which did not surface here is that of powerlessness. It is possible that new principals believe that once they have mastered the job they will be able to fulfill all of its demands so do not yet perceive themselves as powerless. Future research might, therefore, focus more specifically on issues of power and powerlessness. To what extent to principals indeed feel powerless? In what areas do they experience this feeling? At what stage in their careers do they begin to experience it? Again, these issues may relate to the problem of burn-out. Certainly, the combination of heavy responsibility with a sense of powerlessness could contribute to the "emotionally toxic" situation noted by Blumberg and Greenfield (1986).

It was interesting that only two of these principals specifically discussed the conflict between management and instructional leadership, although the potential for this conflict in the other schools was obvious to the researchers. Given the fact that the importance of the principal's instructional leadership is a central theme in the school effectiveness literature, this conflict is probably a very serious one for many principals, both new and experienced. Future research on beginning principals might, then, look more carefully at the evidence for the existence of such a conflict and at how principals cope with it.

The theme of isolation did emerge in this study but not in the way that the researchers expected. These principals did <u>not</u> seem isolated from their peers, apparently because of support systems implemented in their school districts. However, the observations and the analyses of their calendars and mail did suggest that they were relatively isolated from their <u>teachers</u>. It is interesting that none of the principals mentioned a lack of contact with teachers in their interviews. This suggests either that more contact occurs than was apparent to the researchers, or that the principals were unaware of the problem, or that they were aware of it but chose not to mention it. Since the problem of isolation may relate to several other issues--such as inability to provide leadership, feelings of powerlessness, and "emotional toxicity," it deserves special attention in all studies of principals, but especially of new ones. For example,

it would be worthwhile to explore the relationship between the existence of structured peer support systems and principals' job satisfaction. Isolation from teachers also merits serious study.

Finally, it was interesting to find that these beginning principals did not, for the most part, subscribe to the prevailing attitude toward education administration programs which is described in the literature. It may be that these eight principals had not yet been thoroughly socialized by their peers so did not yet share their views on administration courses. If so, then this study lends some support to Wolcott's (1973) theory that principals' complaints about their training are ritualistic rather than substantive. Principals' attitudes toward their preparation programs need to be carefully studied. Do veteran principals and beginners have the same views? If not, at what point in their career do views begin to change, and why? It may be that, faced with a difficult and often self-contradictory job, principals cope with that fact in part by projecting their dissatisfaction onto colleges and universities.

In conclusion, the researchers believe that school improvement depends not only upon the improvement of classroom teaching, but also upon the improvement of principals. After all, even brilliant and thoroughly prepared teachers are handicapped if they are assigned to schools in which the man or woman in the front office is unable to maintain discipline, keep the building clean, or obtain needed resources. Moreover, even brilliant and thoroughly prepared teachers benefit from good

leadership and a positive school climate. It is essential, then, thoroughly to understand the principalship so that men and women can be effectively prepared for it. It may also be essential to understand the principalship so that the job can be modified to meet the demands of today. To both endeavors an understanding of early socialization to the principalship is crucial. This study represents a small contribution to this important task.

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